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# SPOTLIGHT ON REGIONAL AFFAIRS

Vol. II No. 9

## AFGHANISTAN IN THE SHADOW OF DURRANI-GHALJI RIVALRY




SEPTEMBER, 1983

INSTITUTE OF REGIONAL STUDIES, ISLAMABAD

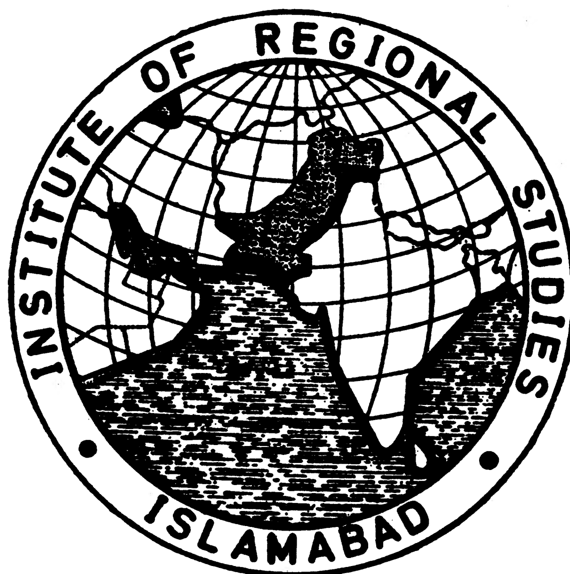
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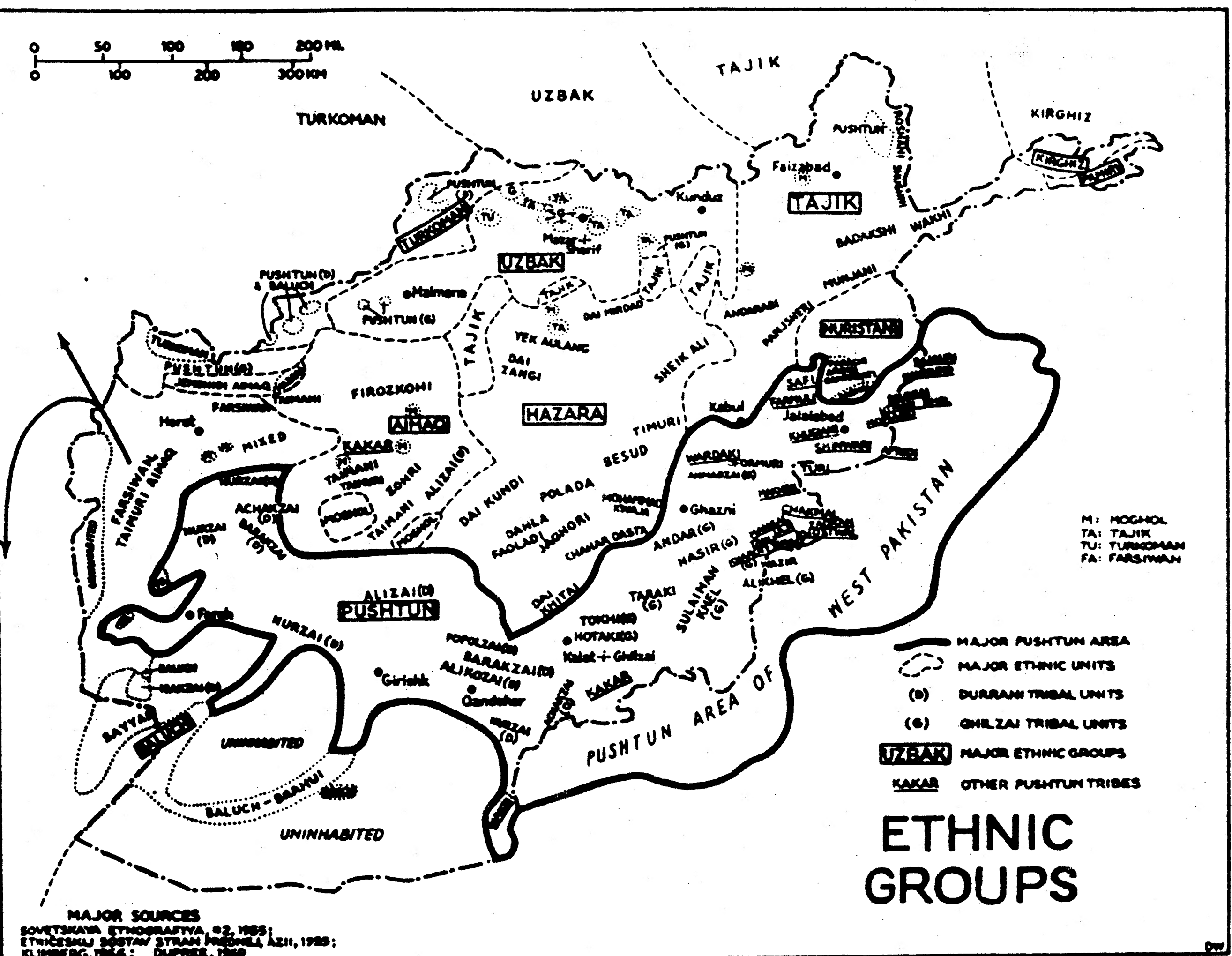



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ETHNIC GROUPS IN AFGHANISTAN
Source : Louis Dupree, *Afghanistan*, 1978.

# AFGHANISTAN IN THE SHADOW OF DURRANI-CHALJI RIVALRY

## INTRODUCTION

In its long and eventful history, the ancient land of Afghanistan has witnessed many ups and downs. Crisis after crisis has contributed to the long-term problems of modern Afghanistan. Deep internal divisions, a weak democratic system, increasing dependence on foreign aid and economic stagnation have stared every government in the face, notwithstanding its shade and colour.

The Afghan history is replete with episodes of long-drawn out conflicts which have given rise to internal contradictions. These feuds did not arise out of a single factor; the factors responsible for the bloody confrontation ranged from religious to cultural, ethnic to racial, tribal to lingual. For generations, the Afghans have been indiscriminately slaughtering each other.

Tribal power has been the dominant force in modern politics of Afghanistan. The rivalry and disunity that still pervades the political scene largely stems from the chronic anarchy of the Afghan society, sharply divided within each tribe as well as in larger groupings among Pashtun tribes. Having crucially contributed to the gradual emergence of the nascent sense of Afghan nationhood, the Pashtuns have traditionally monopolised state power. Almost half of the country's remaining population that comprises ethnic minorities is known to be mutually suspicious and hostile to perpetual Pashtun dominance.

Although the deep-rooted ethnic and linguistic differences have retarded the growth of patriotic feeling and Afghan nationalism, they have never raised doubts and apprehensions on the viability of the modern Afghan state. Even this ethnicity has been described as merely another form of political grouping, because the people have so much in common by similar ways of life, religion and economic conditions. And, in spite of the incessant internal rivalries, Afghans have throughout history cooperated with one another in times of crisis.

The Pashtun tribes, concentrated in the south and south-east of the country but settled far and wide, have either directly or indirectly wielded power in Kabul ever since Afghanistan assumed its present coherent state. These warlike people have frequently dictated terms from their mountain fastnesses, defying central authority and guarding their independence. However, this fierce love for independence has not stopped them from subjugating others. They have time and again embarked upon adventurous forays into alien territory aiming to break rival powers and to establish hegemony.

It is no secret that modern-day Afghanistan came into being as a result of tribal power that was used with astute generalship by Ahmad Shah Abdali to win control of vast regions hitherto governed by two decaying empires —— the Saffavid in Iran and Moghul in India. The great tribal confederation of Pashtuns enabled the founder of the Durrani dynasty to lay the basis of an ephemeral empire. But, despite the presence of a paramount chieftain, who was succeeded to the throne by hiers after an inevitable bloody war of succession, the loyalty of the tribes to the rulers was only personal; these ties seldom took the shape of loyalty to a royal family or a state.

Inter-tribal conflicts were the order of the day in those troubled times when claimants to the Kabul throne figured by the dozen. The Pashtun tribes busied themselves either espousing the cause of one of these numerous contenders or fighting among themselves to settle old scores. The rivalry between two major Pashtun tribes, the Durrani and the Ghalji, was a natural outcome of the fight for supremacy. And it was this age-old tribal conflict which shaped and influenced the course of many events in the history of Afghanistan. The smaller Pashtun tribes sided with one of the two or remained neutral. The ethnic minorities continued to play minor roles, at times exposed to harsh consequences and backlashes of a feud that was not of their making.

This paper attempts to trace the background to the Durrani-Ghalji rivalry over the years and its impact on contemporary events in Afghanistan before and after the Saur Revolution of April 1978.

## DURRANI GENEALOGY

At the outset, it will be pertinent to describe the accepted genealogy of the two tribes. The Durranis, previously known as Abdalis, trace their origin to Sharkhabun, son of Sarbanr, who in turn was the eldest son of Qais Abdur Rashid — the putative ancestor of all Pashtuns.(1) To put it briefly, Sharkhabun is the ancestor of the Western Afghans, namely the Durranis and kindred tribes, while his younger brother, Kharshabun, is the ancestor of the Eastern Afghan tribes of the Peshawar Valley and adjacent mountains to the north.(2) Some scholars have even suggested that the Greek historian Herodotus was referring to the Durranis when he mentioned and described cavalrymen known as Sagartioi: 'a people Persian in language, and in dress half Persian and half Paktuan'.(3)

But there are still more conjectures to the Durrani origin. They have been identified with the Epthalites as well, the White Huns, who were called thus by Greek and Roman writers. A traveller, Masson, wrote of them in his *Travels in Baluchistan* in 1842: 'The Durranis are known both in India and in Persia as Abdalli or Avdalli, and when we find that the White Huns of ancient history, the Epthalites of classical authors, were named Hepthals by Armenian authors, we might infer that the Abdalli or modern Durranis are no other than descendants of that powerful people. The Siaposh Kafrs remember that their ancestors were driven into the hills from the plains by the Odals — a term they still apply to the inhabitants of the low countries'. As it is, the origin of the Durranis is obscure, and they do not emerge from darkness until the time of the Persian King Shah Abbas the Great, early in the seventeenth century.(4)

Abdal, the founder of the tribe, is said to have received his name from Khwaja Abu Ahmad Abdal Chishti after having rendered some service to the saint. His father Tarin nominated him to succeed to the patriarchal headship of the house to the prejudice of his elder brothers Tor and Spin. The leadership then passed on, one after another, to Rajar, Isa, Zirak, Popal, Habib, Bami, Bahlol, Maruf, Umr and finally Malik Saddu (corrupted from Asadullah).(5) This last chieftain's contemporaries included Shah Tuhmasp of Persia and Akbar of India. His successors were Maghdud Khan, Khwaja Khizr Khan, Khudadad (or Khudakai Sultan), Sher Khan, Sarmast, Daulat Khan, Abdullah Khan and finally Mohammad Zaman Khan, the father of Ahmad Shah Abdali.(6)

That the Abdalis were a leading tribe among the Pashtuns is further explained by J.P. Ferrier in his *History of the Afghans*. Citing a legend, he wrote that the Abdalis took the lead of a union of 24 local tribes upon their forced exile into the Sulaiman Mountains from their ancestral abode in the vicinity of Multan in India.(7)

According to most trustworthy accounts, the Abdalis lived separate and independent until about 1600 A.D., when being sorely harassed by the Uzbeks, they became tributary to the Shah of Persia, on condition of receiving help against their enemies. This arrangement continued until 1708 A.D., when the Ghaljis rebelled against the Persian Governor of Kandahar and successfully asserted their independence.(8) Kandahar, which along with Peshawar was to become one of the major economic and administrative-political centres of the Pashtuns, attracted the affection of the Abdalis at the turn of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries when they moved there along with other Pashtun tribes.(9)

The primary division of the Abdali tribe was two-fold, Zirak and Panjpai, all the clans not descended from the former included under the latter designation. The Zirak division, considered more honourable, comprised four clans, namely the Popalzai, Alkozai, Barakzai and Musazai. The Popalzai clan, in particular its Saddozai sub-clan, has furnished the chiefs for the whole Abdali tribe since long. Asadullah Khan Saddozai was founder of the sub-clan and his family came to be known as the *Khankhail* of the Abdalis. He owed his ascendancy to the Safawis of Persia who made him the head of the tribe.(10) The Safawis, acknowledging their supremacy of the tribe, declared in a *firman* that whatever crimes and misdeeds the Saddozais committed, they could not be punished save by judgement of its brethren.(11)

The Barakzai clan, greater in number than the Popalzai, provided the latter rulers of Afghanistan beginning with Amir Dost Mohammad Khan. Drawn from its Mohammadzai sub-division, these rulers ruled Kabul eversince 1826 when the Saddozai power was broken forever. Achakzai is a branch of the Barakzai in spite of the fact that it was separated from its parent-stock for all practical purposes.

The Alkozai is another big clan of the Abdalis, largely engaged in agriculture since long. The clan prospered because Ahmad Shah Abdali's mother belonged to it. Musazai, the fourth clan of the Popalzai, had dwindled down to a few families, becoming amalgamated with the Nasratzai sub-division of the Barakzai.(12)

The Panjpai division of the tribe comprised five clans —— Nurzai, Alizai, Ishakzai, Khakwani and Maku. The Nurzai, biggest of them all, has gradually assimilated the smaller clans and is predominant now. But all of them have equally suffered the dominance of the Barakzai and Popalzai clans of the Zirak division.(13)

GHALJI GENEALOGY

Varying accounts are given of the origin of the Ghalji tribe, which has traditionally been grouped under the so-called Mati tribal confederacy along with the Lodi and the Sarwani. One of the accounts, angrily denied by the Ghaljis themselves, traces the genealogy of this largest Pashto-speaking tribe through the female line to a son who was conceived out of wedlock. The earlier Afghan chroniclers narrate the tale with flowery details while describing how a Tajik

youth of noble birth from Ghor (the modern Hazarajat) developed illicit relations with Bibi Mato, the fair daughter of the austere Sheikh Bitan. But little did the Sheikh know that the disgusted Shah Husain who had taken refuge with him will disgrace the family honour. When the symptoms of pregnancy appeared, the damsel's mother became aware and passed on the horrible news to her husband. After ascertaining through a messenger that the youth was of noble birth, the Sheikh hurriedly married his erring daughter to Shah Husain, aiming to close the chapter before Bibi Mato's pregnancy became known. After a short time, the girl gave birth to a son, who being the fruit of a clandestine amour, was called Ghalzai—— *Ghal* in the Afghan language signifying "thief", and *zai* "born a son".(14)

Those who decry this legendary lineage lump the Ghalji with the Khalaj tribal union that lived within Ghazni but also inhabited Balkh, Tokharistan, Ghuzganan (between Mary and Balkh) and Bust in Seistan. This reference to the ancient abode of the tribal union indicates that the range of the descendants of the Ghalji-Khalaj once lay to the north of the Ghazni Plateau.(15) The Russian Orientalist, Yu.V. Gankovsky, affirms the belief that Ghalji was one of the several Turkish tribes that roamed about the Ghazni Plateau in the eleventh and thirteenth century and were assimilated by the Pashtuns. Many of the Ghalji tribesmen, rejecting the story that brackets their lineage to a sinful act, explain the tribal name as deriving from *Khalc* —— or land they owned in Afghanistan —— hence *Khalszoi*, 'sons of the land' (of *Khalc*). This in time was corrupted to become Ghilzai.(16)

The story of Ghalji origin establishes two inter-related social facts: first, their 'holy' descent and second, their non-Pashtun ancestry. Some scholars suggest that as a consequence of these facts, the Ghaljis are intending to underscore their 'Islamic' character.(17) Since the ethonym Ghilzai literally means the son of sin in Pashto, this lineage seems to have reflected both the folk etymology of the tribe's name and the notions of the tribe's non-pure Pashtun (in the female line) origin.(18)

According to Olaf Caroe, the first obvious fact that emerges from the story is that the early Afghan tradition did not hold the Ghaljis to be of true Afghan stock. Not only is their supposed progenitor a foreigner, but he is the seducer of an Afghan maiden and the father of a child conceived out of wedlock —— a crime punishable by death at the hands of the girl's family. Moreover, Husain is made out to be a Tajik, that is of Iranian stock, but the narrator forgets that the Ghorids who under Muizuddin Muhammad Ghori conquered Northern India for Islam in 1192 A.D. are by some, including Afghan historiographers, believed to have been Turks. On this showing, Husain, an earlier prince of the same Ghorid blood, may have been a Turk who irrupted into the Afghan family of Sheikh Bitan.(19)

The Ghaljis are probably the most numerous, and possibly the most valiant, of all Afghan tribes. And they figure more largely than the Durranis on the stage of the North-West Frontier because from time immemorial, great numbers of them have spent the winter months in what are now the plains of Pakistan, and indeed beyond that in India, too, as far as Calcutta, and beyond, even to Australia.(20) J.A. Robinson, in 1934, estimated the total population of the Ghalji at about a million,(21) while it is now estimated to have

more than doubled to between two and three million.(22) Earlier writers Lumsden, Elphinstone and Masson put the whole of the Ghalji tribe at 200,000 souls, 100,000 families (about 425,000 souls) and 42,000 fighting men, respectively.

The two primary divisions of the Ghalji tribe are after his two sons, Turan and Ibrahim, the third called Bular or Burhan having died childless. The Turan are further divided into four sub-tribes, the Hotak, Tokhi, Nasar and Kharoti, although there exists some doubt about the origin of the latter two. While the Nasars consider themselves an offshoot of the Hotak Ghalji and the Kharoti claim descent from the Tokhi Ghalji, these connections are repudiated by the Hotaks and Tokhis. These latter two sub-tribes enjoyed esteem and leadership of the Ghaljis on various occasions.(23)

The descendants of Ibrahim are included in six sub-tribes, collectively called Ibrahimzai and named after his six grandsons — the Suleiman Khel, Ali Khel, Aka Khel (collectively called Izak after a common ancestor), Sahak, Andar and Tarak. The Suleiman Khel were the most numerous of all Ghaljis, holding the widest extent of country mainly because they were the most warlike and spirited.(24)

EARLY HISTORY

Like their origins, the early history of the Abdalis and Ghaljis is quite obscure. They do not appear to have acquired any political significance during the Ghaznavi period, though they did form part of the invading armies of Mahmud of Ghazni. The Ghaznawid historian, Al-Utbi, tells us that 'Sabuktagin expanded the recruitment of his armies, and there submitted to him the Afghans and the Khalaj: and, when he wished it, he admitted thousands of them to his service — thus they expended their souls and lives in assisting him'.(25) The same practice was followed by Mahmud Ghaznavi and also the Ghorid kings.

But from mercenaries they gradually turned into rulers. In 1290, the power in Delhi was seized by the Khaljis after overthrowing the lordship of the slave-king successors of Qutubuddin Aybek. Olaf Caroe insists that the Khalaj are the same as the Khaljis of the dynasties in India, arguing that the latter was merely the Persianised from used by later chroniclers. He further contends that unlike the popular belief which bracket the Khaljis with the Turks, they had already been assimilated with the Afghans as it may have happened to the Ghaljis themselves earlier.(26) He also cites the poetry of the Pashtun nationalist poet, Khushal Khan Khattak, who while narrating the order and qualities of the Muslim Sultans of *Hind*, wrote in 1650 that the Khaljis were in fact Ghaljis. The Khalji dynasty in Delhi from 1290 to 1320 provided India with six kings; another Khalji kingdom flourished in Malwa from 1435 to 1510 with its glorious capital of Mandu, the ruins of which still stand majestically on a spur overlooking the Nerbadda Valley.(27)

The Ghalji power was revived in India by the two dynasties of Lodis (1415-1526) and the Suris (1539-1555 A.D.), both being descendants of Ibrahim, a brother of Ghalji.(28) The Ghaljis are also proud of their occupation of Persia which they single-handedly held together for seven years (1722-1729 A.D.). Though their defeat in Persia at the hands of Nadir Shah Afshar dealt a severe blow to their

ambitions, the Ghaljis recovered from obscurity to produce a ruler in the person of Azad Khan, a Suleiman Khel Ghalji, who obtained ephemeral power at Tabriz between 1753-1756 A.D. and disputed the supremacy with Karim Khan Zand.(29)

START OF RIVALRY

The earliest reference to the ancient feud among the Abdalis and Ghaljis is to be found in the accounts of Afghan chroniclers who narrate how boundaries were fixed between the two tribes to end a long-standing dispute. The two chiefs were Khudadad (or Khudakai Sultan), the Saddozai head of the Abdalis, and Malakhe, the Tokhi chieftain of the Ghaljis. They were friends and met at Pul-i-Sangi to the south of Kalat-i-Ghilzai to fix the boundary between the disputed tribal lands on the Garmab stream. The country to the north and east of that stream was to be regarded as belonging to the Ghaljis and all that lay to the south and west fell to the share of the Abdalis.(30) Thus, the rivalry between the two tribes was much older and the primary cause of the feud seems to have been disputed lands. It may be added that both these chiefs of the early 17th century possessed *firmans* (documents) issued by the Mughal Emperor Jehangir recognising their leadership of the respective tribes and making them responsible for the safety of roads and adjoining areas.(31)

But this friendship was shortlived. The Persians had taken the possession of Kandahar in 1622 and the two tribes now vied with each other to win favour with their new rulers. The Abdalis after a love-hate relationship with the Persians eventually fell into disfavour and were scattered around, some taking refuge in Shorawak while others exiled to Multan. The Ghaljis prospered at the expense of the Abdalis and major rivalries developed between them at Kandahar and Herat. All during the fight for supremacy between the Mughals and Saffavids, the Ghalji skilfully played off one against the other though they were more inclined towards the Shia Persians and actually supported them militarily in the last serious attempt by the Mughals to retake Kandahar in 1653.(32)

It was during the reign of Shah Sultan Hussain I in Persia that Mir Wais, also known as Haji Amir Khan, raised the banner of Ghalji revolt against foreign rule. The year was 1707. The valiant warrior of the Hotak clan of the Ghalji tribe by a most able combination of flattery, craft and force defeated and slew the hated and oppressive Governor of Kandahar, Giorgi XI (commonly known as Gurgin Khan), to take the first step in the revival of a separate East Iranian state and find for the Afghans a state in their own country. Again, as in the case of 'the Pathan Kings of Delhi', it was a Ghalji who trained and fired the fuse.(33)

The Abdalis, jealous of the rising Ghalji power and also on the lookout for a revenge, now sided with Persians to retake Kandahar and punish the rebels. Abdullah Khan Saddozai, the Abdali chief, aided Kai Khusrau, the Persian Commander, and his Qizilbash and Georgian troops to fight an inconclusive battle in 1710, ending in a truce, and another the next year, resulting in a siege that failed. In the intervening period, the Ghaljis, supported by the Baluch, had defeated their erstwhile foes, the Abdalis, but had suffered defeat

in turn at the hands of the Persians. However, the final victory was reserved for the Ghaljis which confirmed Mir Wais as the *Vakil* (governor or regent) of Kandahar.(34)

Taking cue from their rivals in the south, the Abdalis also revolted against the Saffavids, their long-time allies, and proclaimed Herat an independent state in 1717. Abdullah Khan Saddozai and his son, Asadullah, defeated at least four Persian armies sent against them. The Abdalis, now emboldened by their exploits against the Persians, wished to regain Kandahar which they had controlled until the late seventeenth century. Mir Mahmud, who had succeeded as the *Vakil* of Kandahar after murdering his uncle Abdul Aziz (his father's successor), decisively defeated the Abdalis at Dilaram in 1718, sending the head of the slain Asadullah to Isfahan from where the impressed Persian monarch heaped honours on the young Ghalji chief. The defeat threw the Abdalis into an instability from which they took long to recover and also gave rise to a deadly game of fatricidal musical chairs in which a chief replaced another chief with unprecedented frequency.(35)

Mir Mahmud now led his Ghaljis in a triumphant campaign against Persia and by 1722 the country was his own. But the lust and power of slaughter turned him into a homicidal maniac and before long he was murdered by the Ghaljis to pave the way for his cousin Ashraf, the magnificent master of war who actually vanquished the powerful Ottoman army, to earn respect and recognition from the Porte in 1727 as the legitimate Shah of Persia. However, the end was not far. The Ghalji could win battles but they could not rule. They were utterly devoid of the statecraft needed to adapt their role as rulers of one of the most ancient civilizations on earth. By 1730, Ashraf had lost his ephemeral throne to another usurper, Nadir Quli Khan, a Turkmen of the Afshar clan who had rallied Persia round him in a nationalist fight against the 'rude and boorish Afghans'. Ashraf met a violent end in flight, killed by a force sent by his cousin, Husain Sultan, who still ruled in Kandahar. Ashraf's killing was typical of the Ghalji feud and violence to the end because Husain Sultan was bent upon taking revenge of Mir Mahmud's death at the hands of the unlucky Ashraf. Husain Sultan too met his inevitable fate in 1738 when Nadir Shah moved against Kandahar, assisted once more by the Abdalis. The last of the Ghalji Mirs had been defeated and their brief glory brought to an end.(36)

While the Ghaljis were pursuing their erratic course, the great westerly Afghan tribe of Abdalis was extending its holdings at the expense of the decadent Persia in the country between Herat and Mashhad. The Abdalis at that time were almost equal in numbers and land possession and probably superior in wealth to the Ghaljis; under Mohammad Zaman Khan and Haji Jamal they once succeeded in taking Mashhad from the Persians but Nadir overcame them in 1729 after four hard-fought battles. They were driven back to Herat and the city besieged in 1733, but not before the Abdalis had gone back on their word and violated the armistice thrice in the expectation of reinforcements.(37)

Despite their constant violation of pledges and defiance, it was strange enough that Nadir treated the Abdalis with marked clemency and succeeded in winning their confidence. Perhaps, he was impressed with their Persian affiliation and also knew how well their

ancestors had served Shah Abbas a century earlier. Moreover, a warrior like him could not ignore the martial qualities of the Abdalis. And thereafter developed a growing rapport between the Turkmen and his Abdali subjects. The new alliance first finished off the might of the Ghaljis much to the joy of the Abdalis and then proceeded on its dangerous but successful Indian campaign. The Afghan contingent became the *corps d'elite* of Nadir's army, estimates of whose strength varied between 4,000 to 16,000, comprising mostly the Abdalis. Though the defeated Ghaljis were also represented by mercenaries headed by two of their *Maliks*, the force was largely composed of Abdalis commanded by eight of their chiefs.(38) Among them were the two sons of the slain Abdali *Malik*, Mohammad Zaman Khan, who had been imprisoned by Husain Sultan, the Ghalji *Vakil* of Kandahar. And thus Zulfiqar Khan and Ahmad Khan came into the service of Nadir and was not long before the latter rose to an envious position.

The defeat of the Ghaljis exposed them to misery: they were ordered to move out from the old city of Kandahar to a new one built by Nadir, their fortress and dwellings razed to the ground and Abdali governors appointed over their heads. But, even worse treatment was in store for them when the Hotak Ghaljis, the chief tribe to which Husain Sultan belonged, were to be exiled to Khurasan and their lands given to the Abdalis who were brought en masse from Nishapur and elsewhere in Khurasan.(39) This change-about sealed the fate of the Ghaljis and brought back the Abdalis into the mainstream of Pashtun politics of Kandahar, ending their forced exile ordered earlier by the Persians. And nothing could be more insulting to the Ghaljis than to be ordered to serve as mercenaries a conqueror who had vanquished their pride.

## MODERN HISTORY

In the real sense, Nadir Shah was the founder of the Durrani Empire of Afghanistan for he had provided the Persian foundation on which the redoubtable Ahmad Shah built his empire.(40) In fact, Ahmad was elected the paramount chieftain for the Abdalis at a conclave which was attended only by the leaders of the Abdali sections. The Ghaljis as the traditional enemies of the Abdalis could have provided the greatest potential threat to the new Shah but their defeat at the hands of Nadir and subsequent resettlement had sapped most of their political strength. Once masters of this part of the world, they chose to bide their time and work with the winner but they could never again reach their previous pinnacle of power. They were now at best camp followers, opting to back Ahmad Shah because he led them in the fighting force of 4,000 cavalrymen now at his command.(41) If the Ghaljis had any other pretensions, they vanished with the fall of Ghazni, their final important stronghold.

Throughout the rule of Saddozai Durranis, from 1747 to 1818, the Ghaljis were restless subjects of the empire. During the reigns of Ahmad Shah Durrani (from *Durr-i-Durran* which meant 'pearl of pearls', the name henceforth used for the Abdalis), Timur Shah, Zaman Shah, Shah Mahmud and Shah Shuja, the Ghaljis either fought with the rulers or espoused the cause of one of the contenders to the throne. Zaman Shah, in his hour of distress, turned to them to regain his lost throne from Shah Mahmud, aiming to play up the inherent enmity

of the Ghaljis with the Durranis.(42) During the first reign of Shah Mahmud, the Ghaljis raised the banner of rebellion and fought three tough battles in 1801 and 1802. Ostensibly in favour of Shah Shuja, this general uprising of the Ghaljis has been described by some writers as an attempt by the tribe to reassert its claims to supremacy in Afghanistan. Considering the opportunity too good to be neglected, they even raised one of their chiefs to the dignity of a king. This man was Abdur Rahman Khan, a Hotak Ghalji, while Shahabuddin, a Tokhi Ghalji, was made his *Vizier*. But lack of cohesion, wretched weapons and inexperienced commanders led to the defeat of the Ghaljis and the drowning of their dreams to establish a Ghalji kingdom. They suffered so many losses that the year 1802 is still remembered by the Ghaljis as the *'Sal-i-Katal'* (the year of the massacre).(43)

The Ghaljis later helped Shah Shuja to win the Kabul throne from the usurper Shah Mahmud. Even when the unfortunate but overly ambitious Shah Shuja embarked upon his numerous attempts to regain the throne his cause was taken up by the Ghaljis along with the Peshawar Valley Pashtun tribes. But their friendship of the Shah collapsed once he accepted to become a stooge of foreigners (British) and the Barakzai Sardar, Dost Mohammad Khan, endeavoured to raise the Ghaljis against the alien power. Thus the Ghalji rose once more, in the spring of 1840, only to be crushed by an expeditionary British force and ordered to pay an annual subsidy of £ 3,000.(44) In the following winter, they were up in arms once more, rebelling openly against the foreigners and angered by the reduction of subsidies paid to them. In due course of time, they formed the core of the nationalist force that inflicted crushing defeats on the British, even securing treaties from the rulers. With Dost Mohammad's brilliant son, Akbar, leading them, the nationalists stormed Kabul, murdered many a British including Sir Alexander Burnes and plundered the treasury. The retreating British force was sorely harassed chiefly by the Ghaljis and only one European and a few others of the 16,500 force survived in the winter of 1842 after 65 days of siege at Kabul.(45) Elated, the Ghaljis and their Pashtun allies swore to liberate their country from the *farangi*. The same year the puppet Shah Shuja was murdered and the Saddozais disappeared from history, paving the way for the Barakzais to found another Durrani dynasty.

## BARAKZAI RULE

Despite their important contribution, the Ghaljis were not rewarded. During the long period from 1843 to 1978, when the Barakzais held sway, the Ghaljis always found themselves in the opposition camp. The western Ghaljis waged a fruitless struggle for years against the authority of Amir Dost Mohammad; later they submitted only partially and continued to harass the Amir in whose accession to the throne they had played no mean part.(46) But when their country was again occupied by foreigners, the Ghaljis took the lead once more in 1879 to challenge the British in the Second Afghan War, under the leadership of Mushk-i-Alam Akhundzadah (an Andar Ghalji), Ismatullah (Suleiman Khel Ghalji), Mohammad Jan (Wardak), and Mir Bacha (Tajik). The nationalist forces were headquartered in Ghazni in the heart of the Ghalji country. The next year the Ghalji and other

Pashtun tribes, along with other Afghans, decisively defeated the British in open battle at Maiwand, near Kandahar.(47)

With the accession of Amir Abdur Rahman to the Kabul throne, the misfortunes of the Ghaljis increased. Because of their support of Mohammad Ayub Khan's claims to the throne, they had antagonised the new Amir. The Ghaljis, especially their Tarakki sub-tribe, had espoused the claims of Ayub, the brave but impervious son of Amir Sher Ali and the hero of the battle of Maiwand. Starting from 1881, when the Tarakki Ghalji rebelled, to the general uprising of the whole tribe in 1886, their revolt once again polarised the Durrani-Ghalji rivalry, with the Durrani becoming the pampered tribe of the royal family. It must be remembered that in the early struggle for power between Amir Abdur Rahman and Mohammad Ayub Khan, the Durrani and Ghalji had split into pro- and anti-Abdur Rahman groups.(48) Having failed to topple the ruthless Durrani Amir, who had effectively rallied his tribe to his cause by playing up their traditional animosity with the Ghaljis, the latter were now punished through forced migrations. In the late 1880s and early 1890s, the Amir shifted thousands of Ghaljis, whom he considered his major enemies, from north and south-central Afghanistan to north of the Hindu Kush, where their descendants still dwell. Thus the Amir endeavoured to break the traditional power of the Ghaljis by removing them from their strongholds. The Ghaljis had once again fallen foul of the man whom they had supported once against Ayub when the latter had won support from most of the Durranis in his bid for power.(49)

Amir Abdur Rahman's 21-year rule was followed by the 18-year government of his son, Habibullah. The next Amir was the independent and nationalist Amanullah. Soon after his accession, he strove to win complete independence from the British colonialists, who still dictated his country's foreign policy. The hostilities which followed resulted in the Third Afghan War of May 1919. Mohammad Nadir Khan, the man who latter became the king at Kabul and started the reign of the Musahiban family, led the Afghan force of regular troops and tribesmen, most of whom were Ghaljis.(50) The Ghaljis had responded once more, as in the First and Second Afghan War, to the call for *jehad* against the *farangis*.

But like with all previous Durrani Amirs, Amanullah's friendship with the restless Ghaljis was shortlived. The 1924 Khost Rebellion, initially started by the Mangal tribe, soon developed into a civil war when Abdul Karim, son of ex-Amir Yaqub Khan, jumped into the fray to advance his claim to the throne. The Government attempted to gain the support of the Ghaljis 'by reminding them of the Mangal's previous treachery' towards them.(51) Even after the widespread revolt was crushed through a combination of government and tribal power and by playing off one tribe against the other, the Suleiman Khel Ghaljis in the south of Ghazni along with the Zadran tribesmen held their own against repeated onslaughts.

The Ghalji tribal power was perhaps the single biggest factor in the overthrow of Amir Amanullah, the brief glory of Bacha-i-Saqao, and finally the victory of Nadir Khan. Starting in November 1928, the fate of the tribal rebellion against Amanullah hung in the balance until after the Ghaljis committed themselves against the reformer Amir. The Ghaljis still remembered that Amanullah had betrayed their trust, violated their safe conduct and inflicted

severe punishments on them after the 1924 rebellion.(52) With the Hazrat Sahib of Shor Bazaar, the Mujadidi *Pir*, exhorting his Ghalji followers to rise against the '*kafir*' Amir, the tribe vowed to resist the representative of their old enemies, the Durranis. Amanullah's call to the Hazaras for help further antagonised the Ghaljis because the non-Pashtun, Shia Hazara were their traditional enemies. With the formidable Ghalji fully committed, Amanullah's last brave attempt to march towards Kabul petered out into a nightmarish retreat, hastening his flight from the country.(53) The Tajik Bacha-i-Saqao was indebted to the Ghaljis and he duly appointed Abdul Qadir, a Tarakki Ghalji, as Governor of Kandahar. The Ghaljis also assisted him in sweeping away the remaining pockets of opposition in the area between Kandahar and Kabul. However, their honeymoon with the 'Son of the Water Carrier' was soon over as their Pashtun pride grew increasingly restless over the fact that a Tajik ruled them. The clever Hazrat of Shor Bazaar had also realised that he was backing a wrong horse, prompting him to switch over his allegiance to Nadir Khan. He influenced his simple Ghalji followers either to support Nadir or at least not to oppose him. In the end, many of them joined Nadir's *lashkar* in the reconquest of Kabul and those who did not participate directly remained neutral, thus assuring Nadir Khan that he would not be stabbed in the back at the crucial moment.(54) The Ghaljis, true to their record, had enabled another Barakzai Durrani to capture the seat of government.

## MUSAHIBAN FAMILY

A new king now ruled Kabul but he too belonged to the Muhammadzai division of Barakzai Durranis. For a change, however, the power had been transferred from the heirs of the 'Kabul Sardars' to the 'Peshawar Sardars'. While their spiritual leader, the Hazrat of Shor Bazaar, was elevated as the minister of justice and regained for his family the hereditary right to crown Afghan kings at their coronations, no such spoils of the victory trickled down to the Ghaljis.(55) Among the serious tribal problems that confronted the Nadir monarchy, the most important was the Suleiman Khel Ghalji rebellion in Katawaz beginning in July 1937. This uprising was motivated by the same fear of outside domination that had so often induced the Ghaljis to rise in revolt. It began as a quarrel over the possession of land between two sections of the Ghaljis but developed into a major confrontation once government troops intervened to make peace. The Ghaljis resented the intrusion and took up arms in revolt, appealing to their Ghalji brethren elsewhere to join them. The revolt simmered for quite some time as unlike the sedentary Ghaljis who had to submit, the nomadic Ghaljis refused to come to terms with the Afghan Government. Apart from the resentment of the Ghaljis at the government's efforts to collect taxes, especially customs dues from the nomads who had hitherto conducted trade or smuggling as part of their undisturbed economic activity, the fires of rebellion were also stoked by tribal anger at the Afghan monarchy for not supporting the Waziristan tribes against British penetration.(56)

While the large-scale rebellions of the Ghaljis were no more heard of during the monarchy of Mohammad Zahir Shah (1933-1973) and the republic of Muhammad Daoud Khan (1973-1978), the Ghalji discontent simmered below the surface, for they lived true to an old proverb of theirs: "We are content with discord; we are content with alarm; we are content with blood; but we never will be content with a master".(57)

PROFOUND INFLUENCE

Keeping in view the historical background, the picture that emerges shows that tribal power has had a profound influence on the country's history. While conflict between Pashtun tribes both large and small has been more the rule than the exception in Afghanistan, the two most powerful tribes involved in Afghan history have been the Durrani and the Ghalji. The Ghaljis had their brief moment of unity, glory and foreign conquest in the eighteenth century under Mir Wais and his son, Mir Mahmud. But in spite of their conquests in Persia and India, they never cherished a settled life. To a large extent the Ghaljis remained nomadic, hence aloof from the mainstream of the country's politics. In fact, events show that it became a traditional policy of the Ghaljis to remain aloof from internal Afghan struggles until the value of their intervention became the highest. And it must also be noted that most of the time they were overtaken by events and happenings, as their nomadic way of life rendered them incapable of catching up with fast-changing situations. As the national hegemony of the Durranis increased, the Ghaljis retreated deeply into tribal isolation, hostile to any Durrani dynasty and now and again openly challenging its rule. In situations of national stress, the Durrani-Ghalji conflict would became crucial, an ample proof of which was the Ghalji power decisively thrown in at the last moment to deal Amanullah the *coup de grace* in 1929.(58)

CAUSES OF RIVALRY

As a well-known Pashto saying goes, all conflicts revolve around *zar, zan,* and *zamin,* i.e. money, women and land. The Durrani-Ghalji rivalry seems to have primarily developed from land disputes, which was logical owing to a number of inter-related factors. In the first place, most of the land in Afghanistan was infertile highland tracts; water was scarce and irrigation rights became a constant source of trouble. Imprecise systems of boundary markings and lack of land records added to the problem. In the Pashtun society, ownership of land is an essential element in the status of an individual. Thus *badal* (revenge), which is one of the three principal injunctions of the unwritten law of *Pakhtunwali* that commands a Pashtun's life, often transformed land disputes into blood feuds, affecting not only immediate families but whole villages, and even tribes. Though the Durrani-Ghalji rivalry stemmed from land disputes, it was aggravated when conflicts arose on account of *zar* and *zan,* that is money and women. It has been recorded that Mir Wais' contempt towards the Durranis was partly due to the woes of his grandfather and father at the hands of the Abdali chief, Daulat Khan, who had made prisoners of them and their families and carried them away to Shahr-i-Safa as

hostages. When the celebrated Ghalji chief later married Khanzad, the orphaned daughter of another Abdali chieftain, Jafir Sultan Saddozai, the occasion provided a further cause of enmity. The astute Mir Wais had brought himself not only into relationship with the Durranis but the marriage also afforded him a chance to meddle into their affairs to his own advantage. But in the process, the Ghalji vendetta with Durranis had escalated. The same Khanzad later bore him Mahmud, the conqueror of Persia.(59)

TRIBAL POLITICS

Tribal affiliation counted so much with successive rulers that even the celebrated Ahmad Shah Durrani could not rise above petty tribal considerations. Despite the fact that he earned the admiration of his subjects who called him Ahmad Shah Baba (*'Baba'* meaning father of the nation), he had to keep the rival tribes in check through hook or crook while he ruled in consultation with the Khans of the nine major sections of Durranis. Thus, he summoned the potentially dangerous Ashraf Sultan and his son, Halim Khan, to the capital and threw them into prison despite their having accompanied him on his recent Indian campaign. Allahyar Khan was similarly enticed from Isfahan and imprisoned in Kandahar. All the three chiefs perished and all were Ghaljis.(60) Ahmad Shah thus sought to break the formidable Ghalji power, at the same time striving to appoint Ghalji chiefs of his own choice who would be sympathetic to his cause. It was the same Ashraf Sultan who had intrigued with Nadir Shah Afshar barely 10 years back and brought his Tokhi Ghaljis to join the Persian army in its final assault on Kandahar, thus hastening the downfall of the city governed by his arch rival, Husain Sultan Hotaki.(61)

Amir Abdur Rahman, when he was confronted with the great Ghalji uprising, turned to his own tribe in the hour of distress, trying to exploit the old feud between the Durranis and Ghaljis just as he had done a few years earlier in his confrontation with Ayub. The Amir warned the Durrani Sardars that the Ghaljis now aspired to the sovereignty of the country and to the Durrani position. The Durranis were exempted from land revenue as a price, whereas just before the uprising they were being pressed for payment. The Amir also promised the Durranis that they will be allowed to keep the plunder for themselves following the war. Subsequently, the Durrani Amir drew closer to his tribe, especially to the Barakzais. By granting annual allowances to every male and female member of his clan and looking upon them as *'sharik-i-dawlat'* (partner of the state), the Iron Amir raised them to a privileged position among the Pashtun tribes of Afghanistan.(62)

A somewhat similar but unsuccessful attempt was made by Amanullah to rally his Barakzai Durranis and other clansmen when flames of rebellion against him spread throughout the country. But unlike his grandfather, Amir Abdur Rahman, the nationalist Amir was unable to arouse an emotional reaction among Durranis which could save for him his Kabul throne.(63) His successor after the brief nine-month insurrection of Bacha-i-Saqao was General Nadir Khan who firmly entrenched the power in Durrani hands by appointing a ten-man cabinet mainly from among his kinsmen. Later, his constitution of 1931

effectively centered all power in the monarchy and the royal family, creating a veritable oligarchy. The constitution proclaimed in eloquent praise of the king that the crown of Afghanistan would be transferred to his family, thus eliminating not only other Durranis but also ex-Amir Amanullah and his heirs.(64) However, the Durrani Khans were allowed to share the fruits of government headed by their clansman. Even the deposed King Amanullah criticised the nepotism of Nadir and his overdependence on his kith and kin.(65) But that was nothing new in a society where traditional basis of political alliances was kinship and tribal ties. Thus it was not at all surprising to find during the Zahir Shah monarchy and Daoud's republic that the upper ranks of the civil services were the preserve of the Durrani aristocracy. Although pacified, through a combination of force and bribe, the Ghaljis were never trusted and were confined to the lower ranks of the civil service and the officer corps, where they remained a constant potential source of opposition to Durrani dominance.(66)

Events bear out that the fear of further Persian subjugation and a renascence of Ghalji hegemony drove the Durrani chiefs to elect for themselves a paramount head in the person of the young Ahmad Khan.(67) Not only did he succeed in holding the Durranis together but also by his policies of balancing tribal animosities and constant foreign campaigns managed to channelise tribal aggressiveness away from his own central authority toward external enemies. His period of ascendancy was a befitting example of the Pashtun maxim that "The Afghans are at peace among themselves only when they are at war". He also endeavoured to unite all the Pashtun tribes and his message as recorded in his poetic *diwan* is clearly directed to the suspicious Ghaljis: "All are as one man, Abdalis and Ghilzais. What good it is that the mirror of their souls is clean. Let all Pashtuns stand together".(68)

But the Durranis could ill-afford to trust their traditional foes. Thus the invariable object of their policy was to weaken the Ghalji by widening the breaches which existed between their clans and depriving them of any chiefs of power and influence who might be tempted to lead revolt; and at the same time to reward and placate them. This policy was largely successful; gradually the Ghaljis turned from politics to trade and their tribes became collections of individuals rather than combined political bodies.(69)

INTRA-TRIBAL CONFLICTS

Thus, apart from the conflict between the two tribes, there developed an intra-tribal rivalry between various units of the two tribes. Although bound by kinship ties, most Afghan tribes are far from united internally. Among the Durranis, a long-standing rivalry had raged between the Barakzai and Popalzai, particularly its Saddozai clan. The election of Ahmad Shah Durrani was keenly contested by Haji Jamal of the powerful Barakzai section mainly on the ground that he came from the relatively small and weak Saddozai clan.(70) A further gloss was added to the effect that Haji Jamal secured an understanding that the King's Minister (*Vizier*) should be chosen from the Haji's clan.(71) This dubious insertion was repeatedly highlighted when the Barakzais under Dost Mohammad Khan deprived the Saddozais of power. Amir Abdur Rahman also used this pretext to justify the Barakzai takeover.

The internecine struggle between the two Durrani sub-tribes was largely responsible for the loss of such prized territories as Punjab, Sind, Kashmir and most of Baluchistan of the vast Durrani empire. The fight for regional control in one region often pitted father against son, brother against brother, half brother against half brother, and uncle against nephew in a never-ending round-robin of blood-letting and blindings. As the Saddozais precariously clung to the throne after the death of Ahmad Shah, the Barakzais gradually strengthened their hold of power and in the process became the king-makers. The weakened Saddozais were prepared to become puppets in the hands of the Barakzai Sardars as the scramble for power gained momentum. In the end, the Barakzais set aside the pretence of Saddozai rule and effectively claimed the throne for themselves.

However, whenever any of the Barakzai ruler tried to bypass the power of his kinship Sardars, he was reminded in harsh terms of his dependence on them, followed by an inevitable overthrow if the warning did not achieve the desired result. It happened to Amir Sher Ali. When he had triumphed after four years of bloody civil war in 1869, his rule brought about profound changes in the strife-torn country and his reforms greatly reduced the power of the Barakzai Sardars who had all along opposed central authority. The civil war also brought the Ghaljis into pre-eminence: the army was recruited mainly from among the Ghaljis and the Amir's Consultative Council was dominated by Ghalji elders like Ismatullah and Arsala Khan. All this was enough to infuriate the Durranis as a whole and the Barakzais in particular, and the success of Abdur Rahman which firmly re-established Barakzai dominance was a natural outcome.(72) The new Amir reversed everything Amir Sher Ali had done and the Ghaljis were once more reduced to the role of political scavengers.

The fact that Barakzais were threatening the Popalzai throne even in the days of Ahmad Shah Durrani is proved by his large-scale deportation of the Achakzais, a branch of Barakzai, from their original abodes because he feared the growing numbers of the sub-tribe and wanted to separate the violent and warlike Achakzais from its parent-stock.(73) Ever since, the Achakzais have lived in scattered areas, mostly in the Pakistani Baluchistan and few know that they are Durrani.

## GHALJI DISUNITY

The Ghalji disunity was proverbial. Firstly, there was the feud between the descendants of Turan and Ibrahim. This 'cousin rivalry' pitted the children of the four sons of Turan —— Hotak, Tokhi, Nasar and Kharoti —— against those of Ibrahim —— the Suleiman Khel, Ali Khel, Aka Khel, Sahak, Andar and Tarak. The former, especially the leading sub-tribes of Hotak and Tokhi, were ruined by their defeats at the hands of Nadir Shah Afshar and subsequently their systematic destruction and forced migration. Their fall meant the rise to superiority of the Ibrahimzai, foremost among whom were the Suleiman Khel. With the weakening of the Hotak and Tokhi sub-tribes, the Turan challenge to the Ibrahimzai supremacy was taken up by the remaining Turans, namely the Nasar and Kharoti. The Suleiman Khel confronted this challenge with the active support of their cousins, the Aka Khel and Ali Khel. In fact, the powerful and numeri-

cally largest Ghalji sub-tribe of Suleiman Khel was, and still is, distrusted and feared by all other sections of the tribe. They stand in enmity with practically all others.(74) In addition, there was the perpetual hostility between the large nomadic sections and the more sedentary groups of the tribe. The Suleiman Khel also had a running feud with the Andar and Sahak sub-tribes of its own Ibrahim sub-division. Some of the leading Suleiman Khel clans like Ahmadzai and Jabbar Khel were effectively neutralised by successive Durrani kings through marriages and close connections. This policy of sex-linked diplomacy was largely successful. A classic example was the long possession of Kandahar in the Ghalji country by the four "Kandahar Sardars" - Kahandil, Purdil, Sherdil and Mehrdil - mainly because their mother was a Ghalji married to the celebrated Barakzai chief, Painda Khan, father of the first Barakzai king of Afghanistan.(75)

## CULTURAL, LINGUISTIC DIFFERENCES

Another aspect of the contempt with which the Durranis and Ghaljis hold each other is their way of life, dress and language. The largely urbanised and cultured Durranis consider the Ghaljis uncivilised and vindictive. The Ghalji claim to be of the true Afghan lineage is questioned on account of their Turkish ancestor. And it is said that though the Ghaljis and their sister tribes had conquered Delhi and Persia "yet after all they carry their houses on their backs like snails and that they are '[illegible]' (nomads)".(76)

On the other hand, the Durranis have adopted many of the Persian traits in dress, food and language on account of their proximity to Iran and their long association with Iranian rulers from Shah Abbas to Nadir Shah and even in the later days. They are spoken of by various writers as half-Pashtun, half-Persian. The Ghaljis and other Pashtun tribes tend to look down upon the Durranis as 'Persianised' Pashtuns. The Durrani chiefs and aristocracy has always remained inclined to Persian in preference to Pashto, and they are also more imbued with Persian culture.(77) The Ghaljis, comparing their own performance with the Durranis, contend that even their conquest and long stay in Persia and India could not wean them away from Pashtun culture and language while mere association with the Persians was enough to alter the lifestyle of the Durranis. This argument they advance in support of the force of their character, and claim that their foes possessed no such trait. However, it must be said to their credit that the Durranis, in spite of their being prone to alien culture, did retain their national peculiarities and warlike attributes.

The urban Durranis spoke only Persian and had no Pashto whatsoever - a phenomenon equally apparent today. The ruling family was indeed the trend-setter which communicated only in Persian and adopted all the finer details of Persian culture. The trend was set by Ahmad Shah Durrani's son, Timur, who transferred the capital in the first instance from the 'Pashtun' Kandahar to the 'Persian' Kabul in order to escape the interference of the 'rough-mannered Durrani' and other Pashtun nobles there. Through his unwise deeds he also broke every rule of Afghan behaviour and his Persian affinities further alienated the Pashtun tribes. That is why the tribesmen

used to say of Timur that he was a Persian and no Pashtun.(78) And that is precisely what the Ghaljis say of the Persianised Durranis even today. Indeed the other Pashtun tribes, especially in the Peshawar Valley, came to share this detestation of the Durranis when they were exploited and sold over to the Sikhs with amazing frequency as the Peshawar Durrani Sardars tried to gather their own tribute and to secure their position.(79) The introversions of Kabul under the Durrani feudal rule only happened to increase their despise of the tribe that had ruled Afghanistan for an almost uninterrupted 231 years. Much influenced by the Persians, the Durranis even resorted to Nadir Shah's cruel practice of blinding captured opponents.

## IMPORTANCE OF GENEALOGY

Despite their inherent internal contradictions, genealogy continued to assume an exaggerated importance for the Ghaljis, more so for the nomads among them because of their mobility and the span of their migrations. Unlike settled Pashtuns, they could not identify with known and fixed geographical features such as a valley or mountain. Genealogical memory, oral and imprinted in the minds of the elders, is thus a key to identity. The Ghalji elders fondly trace their lineage to a holy ancestor, Shah Husain, and their tribal mythology. Despite the passage of time and the incursion into their strongholds by modern civilisation, the rivalry to the Durranis has been kept alive. An illusionary comfort is drawn from an old Ghalji proverb which claims: *"Badshahi da Durrani, tura da Ghilzai"* - kingship belongs to the Durrani, but the sword (power, honour, etc.) belongs to the Ghalji.(80)

With almost fatalistic inaction, the Ghaljis explain their downfall from power by a story involving a *pir* (saint) and his 'curse'. Apparently, Husain Sultan, the Ghalji ruler of Kandahar, had displeased a saint from the Afghan tribe of Kakar, named Abdul Hakim Sahib. The venerated *mulla* was expelled from Kandahar as Husain Sultan regarded him a source of danger. As he left, the saint cursed the Ghaljis through *khayray* (literally 'bad prayer'). For seven generations, he had predicted, the Ghaljis would be dominated by their rivals, the Durrani. The story reflects interestingly on history as Durrani rule began in Afghanistan about seven generations ago (allowing about 30 years for a generation). Religious mythology was again sustained for the Ghaljis when Nur Mohammad Tarakki in 1978 came to power in Kabul displacing Durrani rule. The Ghaljis had earlier come to regard the saint's predictions as a prophecy because he had also predicted correctly that his tormentor, Husain Sultan, will be removed by God from his native land and cause him to die in exile.(81)

## UNITY IN CRISES

But it will be wrong to suggest that the Durranis and Ghaljis have always been at loggerheads. There were occasions when even the fractious Ghaljis joined hands with the Durranis for a national cause. A common tribal enemy acted as a catalyst in forging unity among the various warring sub-tribes and clans while a common national enemy prompted them to throw aside, for the time being at

least, all feuds and jealousies. Any one who threatened the independence of the tribes or of their country had to face the combined might of Durranis, Ghaljis and other Pashtuns who until then may have been flying at one another's throat. Thus the threat of invasion on Herat by the Persian Nadir Shah led to an unlikely alliance between the Abdali, Zulfiqar Khan, and the Ghalji Husain Sultan. The two tribes might have fought each other to death for control of Herat, Farah and Kandahar, but any external invader welded them together in a common cause. When the Abdalis again raised the flag of independence a few months later under Allah Yar Khan, they found a Ghalji army from Kandahar by their side.(82)

The same rapprochement was achieved in the First, Second and Third Afghan Wars. With Dost Mohammad's soldier son, Akbar, leading them the Ghaljis, Durranis and other Pashtun tribes brought misery to the British invaders in the First Afghan War. The fruits of tribal unity were once more evident when the Second Anglo-Afghan War (1878-80) proved to be another quasi-disastrous expedition for the British invaders.(83) The month-long Third Afghan War of May 1919 similarly aroused the common hatred of the tribes against the *farangi* and without exception all the Pashtuns fought shoulder to shoulder to avert the common danger. However, they were very much prone to resume their latent feuds and jealousies once the external threat was met, and this precisely has been the track record of the Durrani-Ghalji rivalry.

ETHNIC & TRIBAL PRIDE

Ethnic and tribal pride, which has been described by various researchers as a positive attitude, continued to haunt the 'centralisation' process that was launched from Kabul. In the capital itself, the Durrani monarchy was replaced in 1973 by the republic of Sardar Mohammad Daoud Khan. But the initial euphoria for the new ruler was shortlived. It began to dawn on his leftist supporters that nothing much had changed: one cousin had replaced the other and the King's brother-in-law was now the President. The coup was but a repetition of the timeless contest between generations: nephews replacing uncles and cousins overthrowing cousins. The Durranis still ruled and the Ghaljis remained the disaffected subjects that they always were. As Dupree wrote: "After March 1977, Daoud reverted to the behaviour of an old-style tribal Khan. He reappointed friends, sycophants and even collateral members of the deposed royal family to cabinet. He did what all the Durrani monarchs had done."(84) The Durranis had benefited as a pampered tribe, in particular the close kinship of the rulers. Meanwhile, the Ghaljis engaged themselves in mundane activities, gradually abandoning their nomad existence to settle down as farmers. Though estimates in 1978 numbered the nomads variously between less than one million to two and a half million — it must be remembered that the majority of nomads were always Ghaljis — the process of settlement was especially noteworthy among them.(85)

The Ghaljis, more so their nomad brethren, in course of time came to represent merchant capital and were among the wealthiest groups in Afghanistan.(86) The Ghaljis had also started making their presence felt in the country's army. They had first enrolled as soldiers when Amir Sher Ali recruited Afghanistan's first stand-

ing army. Because of their support for his rule, the Amir had recruited his army mainly from among Ghaljis. The recruitment of the Pashto-speaking Ghaljis meant the prominence of their language as the manual of instruction was now prepared in Pashto.(87) New openings became available to the Ghaljis, like the other oppressed tribes and ethnic groups in Afghanistan, when recruitment to the exclusive military cadet schools was opened up in the 1960s. Other avenues of employment also became available to graduates, particularly in the teaching profession. Later events were to show that the Ghaljis, largely due to their initiative and preponderance, availed the most of these new opportunities. They also dabbled in business and two of the three pioneer entrepreneurs of Afghanistan were Ghalji. While Abdul Aziz Londoni was a Kashmiri whose forebears had migrated from Kashmir to Afghanistan during the eighteenth century, Abdul Majid Zabuli from Herat was a Tarakki Ghalji(88) and Loe Sher Khan Nashir was a Kharoti Ghalji. The Afghan economy received great impetus in the 1930s under the guidance and leadership of these three entrepreneurs. Zabuli contributed to the beginning of industrialisation of Afghanistan through the first Afghan bank that he founded —— *Sherkat-i-Sahami-yi-Afghan* (later known as the Bank-i-Melli). The other two had pioneered free enterprise and established the cotton industries at Kunduz and Pul-i-Khumri.(89)

POLITICAL FRONT

On the political front, the Ghaljis along with the other disaffected Afghans had actively participated in the activities of the *Wish-i-Zalmiyan* (Awakened Youth) organisation that sprang up in 1947 during Prime Minister Shah Mahmud's brief flirtation with liberalism. Rooted in Kandahar deep in the Ghalji country, the movement has been described as a Pashtun reaction to the Kabul-based reformist movements called *Watan* and *Nida'-i-Khalq*.(90) Because the Ghaljis were forever the bitter critics of Persian language and those who spoke it (including of course their Durrani foes), they found their energies channelised in the liberal political *Wish-i-Zalmiyan* movement. Their exposure to progressive politics was to find another platform in the successor to the banned *Wish-i-Zalmiyan*: the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA). Founded on Ist January 1965, the PDPA, also called by its popular name Khalq, initially attracted a hotchpotch of Marxist, liberal and nationalist Afghans. And most of the Khalqis were by origin from the Ghalji section of Pashtuns, and not their historical rivals the Durranis(91) Nur Mohammad Tarakki, a Ghalji from Ghazni, was elected the Secretary General of the PDPA. He was later to become the first Ghalji ruler (President) of Afghanistan ever since Mir Wais had laid the edifice of the first independent Afghan state in Kandahar. In between the two, the Durrani Pashtuns had ruled the country for a fairly long period of 231 years (1747-1978). While it will be a distortion of the significance of the Saur Revolution to regard it as a power struggle between Ghalji and Durrani Pashtuns —— the latter represented by Daoud —— the ethnic and tribal factors cannot be entirely overlooked. It was perhaps no accident that the first non-Durrani to rule Afghanistan after the overthrow of Durranis was a Ghalji. Some observers note that Tarakki's purge of Durranis after the coup reflected a zeal which was more ethnic than ideological.(92)

This view was further corroborated when "Daud was killed along with 29 other members of his family and an estimated 3,000 others who were either Mohammadzais or simply guilty by association with the ruling family".(93)

DURRANI DOMINANCE

That the executive and judiciary was monopolised by the royal family remained no secret and it were these people who were purged following the coup. The first official history of Afghanistan, written after the coup by PDPA leader, Dastagir Panjsheri, claimed that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was completely monopolised by the Mohammadzais and out of 21 ambassadors, ministers and consul-generals posted abroad as many as 16 were Mohammadzais, especially those connected with the ruling Yahya Khel clan. A survey in 1974 showed that Mohammadzais then held nearly 90 per cent of all key positions in Afghanistan.(94) The Pashtun connection of the new Afghan ruler was evident to all, even to the Indian newspaper, *'The Hindu'*, which in its editorial of May 30, 1978, captioned "Afghan Revolution and After" said: "40 per cent of Afghanistan's 17 million population speaks Pashto and not the Dari (Persian) language of the aristocrats. And for the first time in recent history, the country has a Pashto-speaking leader in Tarakki". One writer even went to the extent of alleging that "as a member of the Gilzai branch of the Pashtun group, President Tarakki often favoured the Kalat-Kandahar region".(95) The first statement broadcast from Radio Afghanistan after the revolution carried a veiled attack on the Durranis. It said: "For the first time in the history of Afghanistan the last remnants of monarchy, tyranny, despotism and power of the dynasty of the tyrant Nadir Khan has ended, and all powers of the state are in the hands of the people of Afghanistan".(96) The same hatred was displayed against the 'Naderi', i.e. Musahiban, dynasty and their kinsman President Daoud (perhaps also against the Durranis as a whole), when the *'Kabul Times'* newspaper appeared for the first time on May 4, 1978 after the Saur Revolution.(97) The Pashtun dominance of the government was evident and the beneficiaries for the first time were all Pashtun tribes except Durranis. Of the 22 ministers in the first cabinet, as many as 14 were Pashtun, four Tajik, two Hazara and another two Uzbek. And among the Pashtuns there was clear preponderance of the Ghaljis. The Ghaljis in the cabinet were Nur Mohammad Tarakki, Hafizullah Amin, Major Aslam Watanjar, Mohammad Hasan Bareq Shafi, Suleiman Laiq, Engineer Mohammad Ismail Danish, Nizamuddin Tehzib, and possibly Colonel Abdul Qadir. Of the remaining six, three were Durranis (Nur Ahmad Nur, Saleh Mohammad Zeary, Anahita Ratebzad),(98) two were Khostwal (Babrak Karmal, Prof. Mahmud Suma) and one Zadran (Said Mohammed Gulabzoi). The four Tajiks were Dastagir Panjsheri, Dr Shah Wali, Abdul Quddus Ghorbandi and Major Mohammad Rafi. The two Hazaras were Sultan Ali Keshtmand and Abdul Karim Misaq, while the two Uzbeks in the cabinet were Mansur Hashmi and Abdul Hakim Sharai Jozjani.(99)

COMPULSIONS

While the Ghalji dominance of the revolutionary government was evident, there were other pointers to the fact that ethnic and lin-

guistic considerations carried a heavy weight with the rulers. Thus both Tarakki and Amin pressed for the use of Pashto in speaking to the public.(100) At a later stage Hafizullah Amin, forever an advocate of Pashtun (or Ghalji?) dominance, was to seek to identify himself with the tribal ethos —— not a new position for him. His rhetoric had always been more calculated to appeal to the Pashtun pride and sense of history than had that of Tarakki, and his emphasis on the red of the PDPA flag representing the blood of tribal ancestors shed to maintain Afghanistan's independence was an acknowledgement of the power of this rallying cry.(101)

Once Amin assumed power, the Ghalji dominance of the revolution was complete and this seemed a sharp reaction to the Durrani hold on power of yester-years. Apart from those included in the first PDPA cabinet, many of those who joined later cabinets under Tarakki, Amin and Babrak were Ghalji: Sahib Jan Sehrai, Assadullah Sarwari, Abdur Rashid Arian, Mohammad Salim Massudi, Engineer Nazar Mohammad, Dr Najibullah, Major Mohammad Zarif, Faqir Mohammad Faqir, Kheyal Mohammad Katawazi; even armymen like Shahpur Ahmadzai, Major Mohammad Yaqub and Saleh Mohammad —— the first two of whom later became Chiefs of the General Staff of the Afghan Army.(102) And it was no wonder that the official history of Afghanistan written shortly after the Saur Revolution portrayed the Ghalji nationalists of the past, along with others from the oppressed classes, as the new Afghan heroes while at the same time the rest of the Pashtun tribes were chastised and ridiculed as 'the crown-bestowing tribes of Pakhtia'. Harsh words alone were reserved for the Durranis and they could not have expected anything better of their arch-rivals now at the helm of affairs.

## TRIBAL ETHOS

A tribal society, however progressive, could not rise above prejudices and age-old feuds. Thus ethnic considerations had the better of communist teachings in Afghanistan. According to Kuldip Nayar, since Tarakki and Amin belonged to the Ghalji tribe they recruited their own tribesmen in the cadres that Khalq formed, and the Durrani tribe, even though enlightened, was kept out.(103) The love-hate relationship between the two factions of PDPA, i.e. Khalq and Parcham, and their ultimate parting of ways was prompted more by personal, ethnical and lingual clashes than genuine ideological differences. "The Khalqis have generally had more support in the rural areas and among Pushtun; the Perchamis, on the other hand, have been more favoured by the Tajik, a Persian-speaking group and some Perchami leaders came from prosperous families."(104) Another expert wrote: Their (Tarakki's and Karmal's) personal rivalries appear to be reinforced by cultural and ethnic differences. Pushto is the preferred language among Khalqis while the Parchamis are identified with Dari and significant participation by Tajiks. The rustic sensitivity of the Khalqis is suggested by their claims that Babrak had Mohammadzai connections. (105) Selig S. Harrison commented that "In addition to many of the Afghan officers who had been trained in the Soviet Union, Amin attracted a fervently loyal personal following of other politically conscious young Pushtuns in the armed forces".(106) Anthony Hyman's allegation further colours the struggle inside Afghanistan to be of a tribal and religious nature: In early

summer of 1979 Hafizullah Amin, himself of the Kharoti (Ghalji) tribe, came in person to recruit some 2,000 Ghilzai mercenaries for a brutal expedition against Hazaras of Wardak province, the regime offering not only brand-new weapons and good wages but also (ironically) religious merit, by fighting against Shia Hazaras.(107)

The powerbase of every Afghan ruler was foremost among his tribe and clans with whom he had family ties. Though such a narrow base was instrumental in breeding nepotism, it could not be helped. Thus Hafizullah Amin not only engineered the Saur Revolution by alerting his tribal colleagues, friends and relatives but he came to rely upon them when he tenaciously clung to power in the winter of 1979. Brother Abdullah Amin, nephew and son-in-law Assadullah Amin, son Abdur Rehman, brother-in-law Major Yaqub, cousin Saleh Mohammad, close relative Ismail Danish, and loyal Ghalji friends Kheyal Mohammad Katawazi, Faqir Mohammad Faqir and Major Zarif were all appointed to the choicest positions.(108) In his tendency to place greatest trust in members of his immediate family, Hafizullah Amin remained true to one of the oldest Afghan traditions. Babrak Karmal was no different. Like his embattled 19th century predecessors, Karmal is being forced into greater nepotism in order to create an inner coterie of people he can trust. Brother Mahmud Baryalay, cousin Abdul Wakil and friend Anahita Ratebzad (also mother-in-law of Mahmud Baryalay), hold important cabinet posts. Two more ministers of his cabinet are related to each other: Bareq Shafi is father-in-law of Nur Ahmad Nur!(109) It may also be noted that by playing up the alleged 'understanding' that was reached between Hafizullah Amin and the resistance leader Gulbuddin Hikmatyar to liquidate the Saur Revolution,(110) the Babrak Karmal regime wanted to bring home the point in disguised wording that since both were Kharoti Ghaljis such an intrigue was always possible.

Since the overthrow of the Khalqis, the power has once again slipped out of Ghalji hands. Though there are still some Ghaljis in the cabinet their dominance as was evident till the end of December 1979 is no more. Those who are still there have been effectively kept under check while the more dangerous Assadullah Sarwari has been packed off as ambassador to distant Mongolia. Some have been liquidated and others retired. Ironically, the Ghaljis swelled the ranks of the resistance fighters once they were pushed out of the corridors of power. They may have derived an ethnical and tribal pride once Tarakki and Amin wielded power in Kabul but even that illusion has vanished. Sometime back Zalmay Khalilzad could write lines like these but the situation is a lot different now: The Durrani Pushtuns — who included the former royal family and many of the present rebel clans — were historical rivals of the Ghilzay Pushtuns, who dominated the PDPA, and their opposition was a reflection of the hostility between the two.(111) Only one Durrani name repeatedly makes itself heard in the resistance struggle, that of ex-Major Zia Mohammadzai, who belonged to the royal family; the rest is "a class which hates the Russian occupation no less than the *Mujahideen* do, but which prefers an exile in the West instead of joining the popular resistance struggle".(112)

Perhaps the Ghaljis now form the majority among the fighters who are resisting Russian occupation. Gulbuddin Hikmatyar of the *Hizb-i-Islami* is a Kharoti Ghalji and his group is primarily com-

posed of his own tribe. Nabi Mohammadi is an Andar Ghalji who heads the *Harakat-i-Inqilab-i-Islami*; naturally, his fighters are drawn mostly from his clan and tribe.(113) The two opponent *pirs* who had traditionally attracted the following of the religious-minded Ghaljis now head their two fronts for national liberation. By forming their Peshawar-based groups they have tried to channelise the energies of their disciples into a war which they call national liberation.(114) Another Ghalji, Daggarwal Ahmadzai, is one of the few young field commanders who has earned a reputation for dare-devil adventures.

## CONCLUSION

The history of Afghanistan is practically the story of the two great confederacies led by the Durranis and Ghaljis. The former were supreme in the country for long but the latter possess the more brilliant record. They gave kings to India and Persia and acquitted themselves well in the battle-fields against the might of the Turks and Russians.(115) And they are proud of having won an independent state of Kandahar under Mir Wais. The memory of these achievements led to sanguinary struggles against the supremacy of the Durranis. However, their bravery and numerical superiority was rendered of no avail owing to a fatal absence of cooperation. Due to the extent of the country over which they were spread, local interests caused the interests of the tribe at large to be compromised as some clans held back while others asserted their aspirations through arms. Owing to their position at the head of most of the passes which lead to India and Pakistan, the Ghaljis enjoyed a strategic importance. The British historian, George MacMunn, quoting an ancient maxim of Afghan politics, wrote that "He who would rule at Kabul must make peace with the Ghilzai and make it to a great extent on their terms".(116) Most of the remaining Afghan tribes in the country had no recourse but to adhere to one or the other of the confederacies led by the Ghaljis and Durranis.

While the Durranis were crafty enough to establish a dynasty that endured for long, the Ghaljis on more than one occasion showed that they could win battles but could not rule. They conquered, but being utterly devoid of statecraft, could not hold on to their conquests. It happened in India when the descendants of Bahlol Lodi and Sher Shah Suri lost their hard-won kingdoms much too soon, and it again happened in the case of Mir Mahmud and Ashraf in Persia. Perhaps the same was true of Nur Mohammad Tarakki and Hafizullah Amin when their hasty reforms proved too revolutionary for conservative Afghanistan. Their suicidal confrontation with each other also bespoke of the Ghaljis' proverbial lack of unity and their fatalistic tendency to pull down anyone from among the tribe who may have achieved distinction. One is tempted to trace similar instances from past Ghalji history and there will be no disappointment for the researcher on this account.

That ethnic and tribal pride was still a force to reckon with in Afghanistan despite the discouragement of the successive Durrani rulers could be no more true than in the case of Nur Mohammad Tarakki. He persisted with the use of 'Tarakki' with his name at a time when such affixes were no longer in vogue in Afghanistan and

the people had started using romantic and unique ethonyms. Because he couldn't use the term 'Ghalji' due to the stigma attached to it, he instead prided himself on being a Tarakki and it was self-explanatory that he was also a Ghalji.

And it must be remembered that in the present-day Afghanistan with its still undeveloped countryside and more than 80 per cent of rural population, 'the first loyalty of every tribesman is to his own tribe'. This is especially true of the Pashtun tribes who are still deeply entrenched in a tribal structure, more so in the rural areas. A gradually diminishing tribal system still prevails among the Uzbeks while the rest of the Afghans like Tajiks, Aimaqs and Hazaras have since long freed themselves of their tribal roots.

Though claiming to be progressive in thought and revolutionary in character, the leaders of the PDPA were still unable to think in terms of a class struggle alone as their latent prejudices and petty feuds kept them shackled. An outright war was proclaimed on everything the Durrani rulers had campaigned for and the Durranis were effectively kept out of power. Though the rise of the Dari-speaking Babrak Karmal and his group to power, keeping in view his well-known past contacts with the monarchy, has brought some respite to the Durranis, the power equation of yester-years is a thing of the past. The Durranis may have staged a partial comeback with the concentration of more power in the hands of the three Durrani ministers in the cabinet (Nur Ahmad Nur, Saleh Mohammad Zeary, Anahita Ratebzab),(117) and because of Babrak Karmal's soft corner for the former royal family and his excessive reliance on his Durrani ministers, the Ghaljis in the PDPA are still able to make their presence felt, perhaps due to their sheer numbers, in the persons of Aslam Watanjar, Suleiman Laiq, Bareq Shafi, Col. Abdul Qadir, Abdur Rashid Arian and Dr Najibullah. But the fact remains that the three Durranis, along with Babrak Karmal and other Dari-speaking Tajik supporters and perhaps one or two Ghaljis, effectively control state power through an 'inner' cabinet. Perhaps, the warring factions have agreed to some sort of a power-sharing formula, or is this the facade of a brittle unity achieved on account of Russian pressure?

Whatever the course of events, it will be difficult in future to exclude the Ghaljis from power. For once, they have tasted power and even in their momentary defeat they have the potential to strike back. Will then, the Ghaljis in the Khalq, regain their lost glory? Or, will the presence of an alien occupation force prompt once more the Durranis and Ghaljis and other Afghans to forge another historic and grand coalition for a common cause? These are questions which are being debated the world over and which promise no easy answers.

NOTE: *The Ghaljis are addressed differently by different authors. The tribesmen themselves pronounce the word as 'Ghalji' and that sounds the most appropriate. 'Ghilzai' is the Persianised form which was blindly adopted by almost all the subsequent scribes.*

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